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UNCLAS ABUJA 002744

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR INL/AE AND AF/W
DEAHQS FOR OFE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NDLEA USES PRESS CONFERENCE TO TOUT
INCREASED DRUG SEIZURES, NEW FOCUS ON SEA PORTS

REF: ABUJA 2710

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

1.(U) Lagos-based media representatives were invited to a press conference at the NDLEA's Headquarters October 18. RNLEO and DEA Attache attended, along with the UK High Commission's Drug Liaison Officer. Prior to parading out the six traffickers arrested at the Lagos airport in the last two weeks, NDLEA Chairman Lafiaji gave a short address and answered the media's questions. The Chairman highlighted the recent Kano and Lago airports' drug seizures - totalling 12 kilograms of heroin, 3 kilograms of cocaine, and 116 kilograms of ephedrine, the essential chemical in methamphetamine production. (Note: The ephedrine seized represents one seizure made in August from air cargo arriving in Lagos. End Note)

2.(U) The feature event, however, was the October 15 seizure at the Lagos airport of 11.2 kilograms of Southwest Asian heroin found in the checked baggage of a Nigerian man returning from India via Addis Ababa on Ethiopian Airlines. Lafiaji also noted that the previous night (October 17) NDLEA officers at the Lagos airport arrested a 62-year woman attempting to board the SAA/NA flight to New York/JFK, after discovering through an x-ray that she was carrying pellets of cocaine internally. Lafiaji reported that cocaine and heroin seized to date in 2001 totals 124 kilograms (89 kilograms of cocaine and 35 kilograms of heroin). Most of these seizures were the result of intelligence developed by NDLEA investigators.

3.(U) Lafiaji also announced that the NDLEA now enjoys unrestricted access to Nigeria's sea ports. This resulted from a Presidential decree signed shortly after the NDLEA Lagos Zonal Unit's seizure of 60 kilograms of cocaine at the Tin Can Island port on August 27. With its newly expanded writ, the NDLEA has now decided to create five new Zonal Commands to handle the country's five main ports - Apapa, Tin Can Island, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Warri. This will bring the total number of Zonal Commands up to 25 and will allow a greater concentration of NDLEA resources on port interdiction efforts.

4.(SBU) In a side meeting with DEA Attache and RNLEO, the Chairman disclosed that on October 17 he had attended a meeting on money laundering chaired by the Vice President and including the Ministers of Justice and Finance. Lafiaji claimed that a decision had been made to move ahead expeditiously to revise Nigeria's inadequate money laundering law and to create a Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) in order to address international concern over Nigeria's performance in this law enforcement area. Lafiaji also proclaimed his support for a centralized anti-money laundering agency like the FCC, a noticeable change from his previous statements on the subject (reftel).

Jeter